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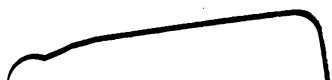
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Daily Conversation with God,
Exemplified in the
H O L Y L I F E
O F

Armelle Nicolas,

A poor ignorant COUNTRY MAID in
France, commonly known by the Name of
T H E G O O D A R M E L L E,
Deceas'd in *Bretaigne* in the Year 1671.

Done out of *French*.

Genes. xvii. 1. *I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.*

Psal. xxv. 15. *Mine Eyes are ever towards the Lord.*

Acts xvii. 27, 28. *He is not far from every one of us. For in him we live, and move, and have our being.*

Life of ARMELLE NICOLAS, Book II. Chap. xvii. §. 16.

God hath sent me into the World for no other End than to love him; and by his great Mercy I have loved him to that degree, that I can love him no longer after the Way of Mortals. 'Tis time then for me to go to him, that I may love him after the Manner of the Blessed.

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M D C C L X V I I.

4. 37

TO THE READER.

THE person, whose daily conversation is here described, was not long since a poor simple country maid, and servant to a great family in FRANCE. The whole course of her life was very instructive, and a most shining pattern of a true spiritual conversation. The particulars here related are taken out of the 18th chapter of the second part of her LIFE, giving great encouragement to a daily and uninterrupted conversation with God. and to walk before him as the omnipresent Lord and Father.

If we knew nothing else of Christianity, nor any other exercise but *this*, to spend one day after another in this manner, it would be sufficient. 'Tis very remarkable, that this person, who served God with unwearied prayer and watchfulness, was so ignorant, that she could neither read nor write, and withal a servant, constantly employed in business and hard labour. By this we see that the true service of God is spiritual, universal, plain and easy, so that no person can be excused from it by any pretence whatsoever.

Some, who discovered her spiritual disposition, would needs have her go into a nunnery, where she might be more at leisure to serve God; which she did accordingly. But perceiving her former zeal and love to God begin to abate, she went to service again; whereupon she enjoyed the same favour of God, as she had done before.

By this circumstance the Lord taught her and her friends effectually, that piety and religion was not confined to nunneries; and that the outward cloistering up of the body, without withdrawing the heart from the world, would never mortify, tho' perhaps it might colour and hide the inward corruptions of the soul. And whereas in that party she belonged to, religion is reduced to the too narrow compass of cloisters and nunneries, this may really convince them, that the life of grace is of a far larger extent, than to be shut up within the narrow pales of certain places; and that neither time nor place can restrain within itself the free and boundless operations of the spirit of God, which are above time and place. An heart humbly resigned to the will of God. and walking in his fear, is the temple wherein the Lord manifests his secrets.

'Tis not so much the changing of places, or names, or modes and forms, or of any thing without us, as the changing of our will and heart, that will render our service at all acceptable to God. Hence the scripture declaring, what sort of change is to be wrought in a soul, requires a translation from darkness to light; (Acts xxvi. 18.) from death to life, (Eph. ii. 5.) and from being lost to be found again, (Luke xv. 32.)

And hence it was, that the person these papers treat of, lost in a manner the sweet enjoyments of a spiritual life, whilst she sought more of them in cloisters and nunneries; but recovered them by going back into her former state of life; which, though it was mean and toilsome in the eye of reason, (too apt to judge of things by the art and contrivance of men) yet was it that wherein she enjoyed richer incomes of God's favour, than perhaps others in the most retir'd solitude. And this false rule of confining religion to certain places, is too commonly observed in that church, this person happened to be a member of.

What is here related of this good ARMELE, is a passage of her daily intercourse with God by faith and love. How she spent her time from morning to night, in her dressing and outward devotion, in the midst of her business, in eating and drinking, in daily sufferings and temptations, in the evening, and when she went to bed. In short: it shews the manner of her child-like, hearty and confident conversing with God as her only love, her father, and intimate friend; and this at all times, in all places, and upon all occasions, without using any other art and mystery, but that of faith and love.

The design of this short essay, is to excite some able pen or other, to undertake the translation of the whole account of this spiritual maid into English; it appearing already in several languages, for promoting the more substantial points of inward and unsophisticated piety and religion. This is taken from the French edition, printed with a large preface at COLOGN, in the year 1704, under this title: *The School of the pure Love of God, opened both to the learned and unlearned, in the marvellous Life of ARMELE NICOLAS, &c.*

The Lord give his grace to all that heartily desire it, always to walk before him after such a pious manner as this pious soul did, whereof she herself gave the following account to the author of her life. A

A CHRISTIAN's daily Conversation
with GOD.

AS soon as I wake in the morning, *saieth she,* I throw myself into the arms of my heavenly Love, as a child into the arms of his father. I rise with a design to serve and please him. And if I have time to pray, I fall upon my knees in his holy presence, and speak to him, as if I really saw him with my bodily eyes. I give myself up wholly to him, and desire him to fulfil all his holy will in me, and that he would not suffer me that day to do the least thing which might be offensive to him. Then I recommend to him all the prayers which shall be made that day. In short: I love and praise him as much and as long as my affairs permit; tho' very often I have hardly so much time as to say the Lord's prayer. But I do not trouble myself about that; for I have God always in my heart, as well when I am about my business, which I do in obedience to his will, as when I retire on purpose to pray to him. 'This he himself has taught me, that whatever I do out of love to him, is a real prayer.

I dress myself in his presence, and he shews me that his love supplies me with raiment. And when I go about my business, even then doth he not forsake me, nor I him, but he converses with me, and I with him; yea, I am then as much united to him, as when I am at my prayers, set apart on purpose for my spiritual recollection. O! how sweet and easy is all labour and toil in such good company! Sometimes I perceive such strength and support in my mind, that nothing is too hard for me, and I think myself alone able to manage the affairs of the whole family. No-
thing

thing but the body is at work, the heart and myself burn with love in the sweet familiarity I entertain with God.

I eat and drink in his presence, as I do every thing else, and it is as if I dipp'd every bit into the precious blood of my Saviour, and as if he himself gave me food, on purpose to inflame my love, and to engage it the more to himself. I leave you to judge what effect this must have upon my soul. Indeed it is impossible for any body to express it but God himself. As for me, my whole life would never be sufficient to give an account of it.

When I am about my business in the day-time, running up and down, till the body begins to be weary, or to repine, or to desire unseasonable rest, being oppressed with anger and uneasiness; my divine love enlightens me forthwith, and shews me, how I ought to suppress those rebellious motions of corrupt nature, and not to nourish them at all, either by word or deed. This love keeps the door of my lips, and watches over my heart, that it may not in the least contribute to such irregular passions, which thus are crushed and subdued as soon as they rise.

But if, at any time, for want of care, I am surprised with these or the like faults, I cannot be at rest, till I have obtained pardon, and God be reconciled to me. I lie prostrate before his foot-stool, confessing all my faults to him, as if he did not know them already; and there I continue, till he has forgiven me, renewed his friendship with me, and confirmed it more than before. For so it always happens through his infinite mercy, whenever I have committed a fault, which serves but to inflame my heart more and more with his divine love. If people persecute me, and by foul and uncharitable censures raise scandals upon me, or any other way afflict me; or if evil spirits attack me with their crafty and cunning temptations, I then presently run to my heaven

ly Love, who readily stretches forth his sacred arms to receive me, shewing me his heart and wounds open for my security; in which I hide myself as in a strong castle and fortress. And then I am so mightily strengthened, that if the whole army of hell itself, together with all the creatures, should rise up against me, I fear them no more than a fly, because I am under the protection of the most high God, his love being the hiding-place and safe-guard of my soul.

If God at any time hides his face, making as if he would go away from me, I tell him; ‘O!’tis no matter, my Love, conceal thyself as much as thou pleasest, nevertheless I’ll serve thee; for I know ‘thou art my God.’ And then I stand upon my guard more than ever, to be faithful to him, for fear of displeasing my Love. And at the same time perceiving the greatness of my misery and poverty, I insist the more upon the merits of our Saviour, and resolve to rest contented, tho’ it should please him to leave me all the days of my life in such a condition. But he never lets me continue long under these circumstances, and if I may venture so to speak: he cannot forbear loving me, any more than I can live without him.

At his return he recompenses the little moment of his absence with so many caresses and endearment, that oftentimes I am not able to bear them, but forced to cry out: ‘I can receive no more! wherefore I desire him to moderate my sensation, or else to let me die under the powerful sense of his gracious presence.’

Many times, to bear this the better, I left all, retiring into a corner to ease myself, by giving vent to the tears and praises due to his Majesty, wherewith my heart was overcharged. And this I may do very well, since it is not the mere sense of his kindness I long for, but rather HIMSELF ALONE, that I desire to enjoy. *Although* in the mean time one ought
thank-

thankfully to receive these extraordinary tokens of God's mercy and love, if it be his holy will so to deal with us.

If I am persuaded on holidays, to be merry in company, I excuse myself. For nothing can be compared to the pleasures of my Love, which are so much the sweeter and greater, for my withdrawing from all company whatsoever. If they wonder, how I can stay always at home alone, I think within myself: 'O! if you knew the glorious company I have, you would not say that I was alone; for I am never less alone, than when I have no body with me.'

After this manner I spend not only working days, but holy days too, being often as much employed in the latter as in the former. But that is no hindrance to me, to whom labour and rest, hard work and easy, all things are indifferent, since I do not look upon what I have to do, but upon him for whose sake I do it. I am so taken up with his love, that I have no time to mind myself, nor any thing else but him alone.

But if I do any thing amiss, or out of season, the same moment I feel a violent pain and sorrow for what I have done, springing from my Love, which also makes me presently hope for pardon; so that thinking of it no more, I go strait forward on my way, turning aside neither to the right hand, nor to the left. Neither do I remember what is past, or to come, but only, that I may love God to the utmost of my power.

The night coming on, and every one going to rest, I find rest only in the arms of divine Love: I sleep leaning on his holy breast, like a child in his mother's bosom. I say, I go to sleep, but being still busied about the love and praises of my God, till I fall quite asleep. Many times this Love rouses up all my senses, so that I cannot sleep the greatest part of the night, but I spend it in the embraces of the lovely grace of God, which never forsakes such a poor miserable creature

as I am, but preserves me, and takes special care of me.

If in the night the evil spirits hover about, to torment or to surprise me, (which often happens) this divine Love guards me, and fights for me. Yea, it gives me grace too, to resist them courageously, as if I were awake. For they seldom continue long to assault me, unless it be in my sleep.

And this is the life I have led for these twenty years past, without perceiving the least change of that love which was poured out into my heart, after my sincere conversion unto him. Nay, I have observed its daily increase, tho' every day it seemed impossible to endure any addition to what I already enjoyed. But truly, it is an infinite love, which satisfies and nourishes me, so that every day I have a new hunger, tho' methinks I can receive no more, than what I possess already every moment.

THE author of her life says, concerning the manner of her expressions, that they were always very modest, without any noise or vehemence: her common discourses were always holy and edifying; whereas others too commonly mis-spent their time in useless conversation and unprofitable talk. If she was in company, where they talked of indifferent or evil things, she had the faculty of giving them such a handsome turn, as to bring them quite off from that, to some good and useful subject.

For a long while she could bear no other discourse but of God and his holy Love. *I cannot imagine, said she, how a soul, created for heaven, can be concerned about the dross of this world.* From that time, if she happened to be in company, where the subject of the discourse was but indifferent, either she did not mind it at all, entertaining herself in the meanwhile with God; or, as soon as she thought it proper, *she diverted and changed the discourse; think-*
ing

ing it but lost time, which was spent in the trifles of this world.

To every body, that had a mind to be acquainted with God Almighty, she gave this advice: ' To be
' silent, and to learn to keep their thoughts together
' in the center of the heart: for this (said she) is the
' beginring of our union with God, and by these
' means the soul forgets earthly things, and raises
' herself up to the contemplation of heavenly objects.
' We ought to lose our familiarity with the creatures,
' if we desire to enjoy the conversation of the Creator;
' a moment of which doth afford more delight and satisfaction,
' than all the finest discourses in the world.'

SHE declared once, that she did by no means encourage any desire of knowing what did not concern herself. When a certain person asked her, whether she did not know such a story, that the town rang of at that time? she answered, ' no; and gave God thanks,
' that she never knew any thing of the news of
' this world, neither did she desire to know it. But
' she knew a great deal of news concerning the love
' and mercies of Almighty God. For this, she said,
' was the only thing she desired to know, and where-
' with her heart was entirely taken up.'

The real experience she had of the inward and spiritual life of grace, and of the manifold operations it was attended with, doth abundantly appear from the larger account of her life and conversion. To give the reader a taste thereof, may suffice for the present:

One time when her mistress was afraid that *Armelle* was like to run quite mad by an excess of devotion, she forbid her all spiritual exercises, and would not let her go even to church, except on the Lord's-day only: *Armelle*, being sensible of the false step her mistress took, smiled within herself, saying, ' Truly,
' I am not mad, after I have found my Beloved,
' whom I now love with all my heart. I remember
' a time

‘ a time when I was seeking only God without me, and then I was mad indeed.’ This mistress of her’s being of a sour and morose humour, shewed a deal of ill-nature to *Armelle*, of which, however, she never complained, but rather thanked God, that he was pleased to make this a means of her fuller purification. When her spiritual director himself, seeing what she suffered in that house, advised her one time, entirely to quit that place, she replied according to her usual earnestness: ‘ Why would you have me flee from the cross which the Lord himself has entailed upon me? No, by no means: I shall never do it, except you absolutely command it. If I should undergo a thousand times as much, I shall never forsake the place for all that, but rather stay till they turn me away by force.’ In which unexpected answer her spiritual director entirely acquiesced, never prompting her again to quit a place where she had daily opportunity to practise patience and self-denial; virtues so much contrary to the whole bent of corrupt nature, and yet so necessary for rightly framing a Christian life and conversation. At another time she said: ‘ If the soul be but well grounded in the favour of God, and lively affected with the operations of his grace, all the insults of the devil, and of the creature, are borne with joy and comfort. But this is misery indeed, when the Lord himself withdraws from the soul, and lets her shift for herself. Then she thinks, that every step is a step into sin and corruption, being utterly unable to protect herself against it.’

In what company soever she was, she talked of nothing more, than of being *faithful to God*. Nothing dropped more from her mouth, than, *Let us be faithful, let us be faithful to the Lord*. This word she thought fit for any time, and suitable to every company. Now and then she would repeat it an hundred times over; and being asked by her friends, whether she had nothing

thing else to say? She answered: ‘ Don’t wonder at
 ‘ my saying this over and over again. If I should live
 ‘ a thousand years, I should still tell you the same
 ‘ thing. For ’tis faithfulness, wherein the perfection
 ‘ of a Christian life consists.’

Of the constraining power of the divine love she
 has the following expression: ‘ Whenever I hap-
 ‘ pened to adhere a little too much to my natural in-
 ‘ clinations, (apt to steal in upon the mind under
 ‘ the specious pretence of necessity) I was immediate-
 ‘ ly reproved by the love of God. This divine love
 ‘ is like a careful tutor, who takes all the pains
 ‘ imaginable, for advancing his pupil in the way of
 ‘ learning he is engaged in; and for this reason keeps
 ‘ his eye constantly fixed on him, both to correct his
 ‘ failings, though never so small, and to prevent his
 ‘ being led away by any thing that might divert him
 ‘ from his chief employment. Thus, *says she*, dealt
 ‘ the Lord with me. He kept me closely confined to
 ‘ an holy awe and wariness; and when I happened
 ‘ by one oversight or other to withdraw, as it were,
 ‘ from his eye, he in that very moment pursued after
 ‘ me, and recalled me to my duty. But all this was
 ‘ done with so much love and tenderness, that it must
 ‘ be a heart of brass, if not mollified by such en-
 ‘ dearing marks of love and kindness.’

Of the disorderly love to friends and relations,
 which now and then even well disposed souls are too
 much guilty of, she gives the following account: ‘ One
 ‘ time, *says she*, my parents came to see me; when
 ‘ I entertained them, I found myself transported with
 ‘ some vain joy and pleasure, and somewhat coldish
 ‘ in minding the impressions of the love of God; nay,
 ‘ it seemed as if the Lord himself did in a manner
 ‘ withdraw from me, to let me have, as it were, the
 ‘ more liberty for the present. But no sooner my pa-
 ‘ rents were gone, and I come to myself, the bur-
 ‘ den and affliction I then felt upon my spirit, was
 ‘ heavy

‘ heavy enough, since I did not find him whom I
 ‘ loved more than my own soul. However, as soon as
 ‘ I came home, I felt again a noble return of the di-
 ‘ vine love, and it was, as if the Lord had waited for
 ‘ me on purpose, to communicate himself unto me.’

After this she freely confessed, that from that ve-
 ry time she found herself entirely freed from all man-
 ner of irregular adherency to her parents, whom she
 was too fond of heretofore, being now only taken
 up with the grand concern of promoting the more
 spiritual part of her friends and fellow-creatures :

‘ Thus, *says she*, the love of God made every thing,
 ‘ nay even my very faults and imperfections, redound
 ‘ to my greater spiritual good and welfare.’

’Twas mentioned before, how earnest she was in
 exhorting every one to be faithful unto the Lord with
 what he had received. This faithfulness recommend-
 ed by her unto others, she was a most shining pat-
 tern of herself in her whole life and conversation. But
 it most visibly appeared in that unwearied readiness
 and quickness she dispatched any thing tending to
 promote the glory of God in her station. No sooner
 was she convinced of the will of God, but was very
 earnest and diligent, to answer it presently. She often
 wondered at some peoples dilatory doings in the ser-
 vice of God, and said, it was a cunning fetch and stra-
 tagem of the devil, to make people put off from one
 day to another such designs as might serve to advance
 the glory of God, and the good of our fellow-crea-
 tures. ‘ *For, said she, it often happens, that that grace*
 ‘ *which at one hour offers itself to a man, in order to*
 ‘ *support him under some difficult enterprises, is not so*
 ‘ *easily met with at another time.* And besides this,
 ‘ how uncertain is our life ! nay, if we were sure to
 ‘ live longer, yet ought we not to linger upon that
 ‘ account at all, nor to defer from one day to another
 ‘ what might be done this day. A man that is full
 ‘ of delays in the service of God, must needs have
 ‘ but

‘ but little love at the bottom. *Wherever love is raised to any considerable degree, there the soul can’t rest, whilst there remains any thing to be done required by the beloved.* And this dilatory temper, *she said,* was a great impediment in the way to perfection. Many souls were convinced of the will of God, but being too backward constantly to struggle against the corrupt propensions of their dull and lazy temper, they made but a slow progress in the work of religion. They say, to-morrow, to-morrow it shall be done in good earnest; but that to-morrow never comes. The consequence whereof is, that the longer they flatter themselves in their disorderly and wonted customs, the less able they are to resist them at last at all: the Lord leaves them now to their own will, since they did not improve faithfully what once they had received.’

THE virtue of humility was as remarkable in this holy maid as any of the rest; and it was grounded on a true and solid foundation too. She confesses herself, that the infinite love of God kept her undefiled as to the vanity of pride; insomuch that she did not know what pride and haughtiness was. ‘ I was astonished, *says she,* when my father confessor told me to watch against pride; for I thought whilst I was well in my wits, I could not possibly be proud. I was so fully convinced that any thing really good was from God, that if all angels and men had offered to persuade me to the contrary, I should never have believed them. And this sense fortified me against all manner of pride and presumption, my own conscience never charging me with the least guilt of that vice, and I could not imagine how it was possible, that men should attempt so heinous a thing as this.’ And this was the reason, that she never would quit that manner of life she was bred to, though mean and contemptible in the eye of the world.

Even

· Even her spiritual friends would now and then most importunately intreat her, to resign up to any body else her place, (which was that of a servant) and this under a fair pretence too, viz. That she might have the more leisure to give herself up to a contemplative life, and thus to enjoy the favours and gracious infusions of the Lord more abundantly. And indeed there wanted no opportunity of attaining such a quiet retirement, as some had cut out for her. But she could never be prevailed with to comply. She had too high an esteem for her low condition. She said, ‘ she should never do such a thing, except she was visibly convinced of the will of God. For though her station was but mean, yet was she more pleased with it, than with all the prayers and contemplations she perhaps might enjoy in the most concealed solitude of the world. She said, her outward employment and all the drudgery she was put to, did not at all cool or weaken the sense of the love, and of the gracious presence of the Lord, she usually enjoyed. Nay, the more fervent she was to spend herself entirely in works of charity, cheerfully complying with every thing incident to her life, the more plentiful incomes she had of the love and favour of God. Hence, it would be the effects of a false heart, if one should make bold to quit his outward employment, in order to gain more rest and quiet in another place. *God, says she, knows ways to find souls wherever they be, if they do not wilfully shut their hearts against him.*’

Because her love to God was so great and fervent, the love she bore to her fellow-creatures, was also wonderfully influenced and inflamed thereby. When she considered the woful state of the wicked, and the dreadful judgment that is like to befall them at last, she then felt a more tender and commiserating love, and her very bowels began to yearn for compassion. *When she looked upon the happy state she was arrived*

rived to, and the severe doom attending such profligate wretches, she used to say, ‘ She seemed unto herself like one that had been in a great storm at sea, and by stress of weather like to be cast away every minute ; but getting off at last safe and sound, remembered now ashore the dangers his brethren and near relations were still exposed to, being tossed up and down in the huge ocean, and left to the mercy of the roaring billows. Alas ! *said she*, thus it is with me, when I lay to heart the danger sinners run themselves into. For the more endearing marks of divine grace the Lord has been pleased to bestow upon me, the more fervent is my desire, that also others might partake of the same with me.’

AND now, ye learned men, and refined wits of the age, come hither and admire the ignorance and simplicity of this poor country-maid ! Consider how far she exceeds your high flown superficial wisdom, and the dark flashes of human wit and learning ? And was it possible for her, to attain to this *heavenly wisdom and divine knowledge*, to such a nobleness and elevation of mind, without the scraps and assistance of artificial learning and philosophy ? then truly, there must be another school wherein those that *flow unto the Lord*, (Pl. xxxiv. 5.) *are lighted*. Indeed, *to know the love of Christ, passeth all knowledge*, Eph. iii. 19. Concerning which our Saviour was pleased thus to express his grateful sentiments with hearty joy, and heavenly triumph : *I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight*, Matth. xi. 25, 26 *For it is written*, (says St. Paul) *I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent ? Where is the wise ? where is the scribe ? where is the disputer of this world ? But God hath chosen the foolish things of this world, to*
con-

confound the wise ; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world, to confound the things which are mighty. And base things of the world, and things which are despised hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are. That no flesh should glory in his presence, 1 Cor. i. 19, 20, 27, 28, 29. Isai. xxix. 14. Chap. xxxiii. 18.

Laurentius de la Resurrection, in his spiritual letters, says : ‘ I desire you to remember what I have often recommended to you, viz. That you do not forget God, day or night, in all your employments and exercises, nor in your bodily refreshments. He is always present with you, do not let him stay alone. It would be very uncivil to leave a friend alone by himself that came to see you. Why will you do so with God ? Pray do not forget him ; think often upon him, pray to him without ceasing ; live and die with him. This is the best work a Christian can be employed about. In short, it is our profession, our trade and calling.

‘ If we do not know it, we must learn it : we must deny all that doth not tend to the glory of God, and use ourselves to a continual, familiar and humble conversation and intercourse with him. And withal, to prevent our souls swerving from it upon any occasion whatsoever, our heart must be the spiritual temple, wherein we continually offer up our prayers. We must watch ourselves narrowly, that we may neither do, nor speak, nor think, whatever may be displeasing to him.’ Col. iv. 2. Chap. iii. 17.

F I N I S.

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